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PROFESSOR LASSEN'S

ANTIQUITIES OF INDIA.

IF we leave out of view the researches of the Jesuit missionaries, which led to no results of much importance to the cause of learning, the languages, literature and institutions of India may be said to have been first investigated by the Asiatic Society of Bengal, founded in 1784, through the influence of Sir William Jones, who became its first President, and brought into its service his enthusiasm, perseverance and elegant scholarship; and in later times, the very valuable works of Colebrooke, Wilson, and others, have made us still farther indebted to British scholars, for our knowledge of India. But the scholars of Continental Europe soon took up the interesting inquiries, which were suggested by the opening of India to the learned world; nor can it be questioned, that they have done the most, to reduce to a consistent whole the new materials of knowledge, obtained by the establishment of the British empire on the Ganges. The ingenuity, acuteness and patient labor of Bopp, applied to the language of the Brahmins, have made the University of Berlin to be the head-quarters in Europe for the study of the Sanskrit; while the refined æsthetical discern-

ment of August Wilhelm v. Schlegel, and Lassen's power of critical and genial research, exercised over the whole widening field of Hindu literature, have caused the science of Hindu antiquity to strike its deepest roots at Bonn, the seat of another German University. The French nation, also, may justly claim to have taken no inconsiderable part, by its Burnouf, in bringing our knowledge of the languages and literature of India, to its present degree of maturity.

We are led to make these remarks by the publication of the first part of Professor Lassen's *Indische Alterthumskunde*,¹—a work designed to be a critical digest of all the researches of the last sixty years, relative to the antiquities of India. Something similar was attempted in 1800, by Thomas Maurice, in his *Indian Antiquities*; but the original sources of information could then be used only to a limited extent. Another similar work was published at Königsberg, in 1830, by Professor P. v. Bohlen; which rests upon a broader foundation, yet is not quite trustworthy, having been written on a theory with respect to the influence of Hindu civilization upon the Egyptian, as its title intimates: *Das alte Indien, mit besonderer Rücksicht auf Aegypten*; and besides, some of the most important original sources have been rendered accessible only since v. Bohlen wrote. The work of Professor Lassen, to judge of it by the specimen before us, is in all respects, more to be relied upon. We propose to give an outline of this first part, in the following pages.

The work begins with a rapid, though very instructive sketch of the geography of India, after the example of that father of scientific geography, Professor Carl Ritter,—with constant reference to the connection between geography and history. The mountain-ranges, mountain-passes and river-courses of the peninsula, the gradual descent from its snow-capped heights to tropical plains, its extent in latitude, and its connections with adjacent countries, are considered with a view to the question of the origin of the Hindus, and the

¹ *Indische Alterthumskunde*, von Christian Lassen. Ersten Bandes erste Hälfte. Bonn: 1843.

course of their migrations, the climate and vegetation of India, the direction of its commerce in ancient times, its political subdivisions and the religious conceptions peculiar to its native inhabitants. After this, our author takes up the history of India, commencing with an extensive ethnological analysis of the present population, which he proves to be made up of at least two distinct races, the one an indigenous and the other a foreign. The history of the country, in the stricter sense, is divided into two principal periods, of which the earlier, or that of the independence of the Hindus, extends down to the Muhammedan conquest, while the latter embraces the whole time since the invasion of Mahmûd of Ghizneh, or A. D. 1000, during which the destinies of the Hindus have become more and more linked with those of western nations. The former of these periods is subdivided by the epoch of the death of Buddha, or B. C. 543, for the promulgation of Buddhism was an event which caused, to use our author's words, "a more lasting and a wider schism in the entire development of Hindu nationality," than had before occurred. "To this is to be added," as he also observes,² "that the history of India is better ascertained, and has a firmer chronological foundation, from the time of the promulgation of Buddhism. The Buddhist literature, moreover, forms the line of separation between the ancient and the more modern monuments of the spirit of Brahmanism, and therefore marks for us, the commencement of the more recent age of India under Brahman institutions." The Buddhist schism was also, contemporaneous with the establishment of the dynasty of the Achaemenidæ in Persia, which led to the extension of the Persian power to the Indus, and thus became the means of the acquisition of the earliest knowledge of India in the west, obtained through Hecateus and Herodotus. The subdivision of the period before Buddha into the age of the Vêdas and the epic age, though distinctly marked in the history of the Hindu religion, is left out of view by our author in this part of his work, as our limited acquaintance with the Vêda-literature admits of only partial inferences from it, respecting the political state of

² S. *Indische Alterthumskunde*, p. 356.

the Hindus in that remote antiquity to which it carries us back.³

Having in this manner defined the periods of Hindu history, Professor Lassen inquires into the historical value of the epic and purânîc traditions, which are the principal original sources to be consulted, with respect to the most ancient times. He then discusses the deeply interesting question, whence came that race which he has shown on ethnological grounds, not to be indigenous to India; and adds a few pages on the earliest traditions it has preserved of its abode in India.

We must notice some of the geographical points laid down by our author, but we shall dwell more particularly on his historical conclusions.

The application of the name of India, to the whole country now so called, has no native authority. We derive it from Herodotus, who seems to have extended over the whole interior eastward of the river Indus, the name *Hidhu*, or *Hendu*, which, as we know from a cuneiform inscription of Darius Hystaspes, and from the Zendavesta, was given by the ancient Persians to a part of India watered by this river. The Arabs, also, even before Muhammed's day, applied the name *Hind*, to the whole of India; and in later times, gave to the country of the Indus the distinctive appellation *Sind*, which, as well as the old Persian *Hindu*, comes from the original Sanskrit name of the river Indus, *Sindhu*. *Hindustan*, or the land of the Hindus, is a modern Persian name, of Muhammedan origin, denoting either the whole of India on this side of the Ganges, or more specifically that part of it which lies north of the Vindya mountains. The name of the land of the Hindus, which appears in their own traditions, is *Aryāvarta*, or land of the Aryas, and includes only so much of Hither India, as is between the Himâlaya and the Vindya, or what is more commonly known as Central India. This traditional name is of much importance, on account of its affinity to certain names of countries and people

³ From the last number of the Oriental Journal published at Bonn, we learn that Dr. Roth of Tübingen has recently contributed to enlarge our knowledge of India in the age of the Vêdas, by a work entitled: *Zur Literatur und Geschichte des Weda*. Stuttgart: 1846.

of Iran, which occur in the *Zendavesta*, as well as in the writings of Greek historians and geographers, and in the Sassanidan inscriptions. It affords an argument respecting the origin of the Hindus.

The Himâlaya, in its whole extent, bounds India not only on the north, but also on the east and west; and nature seems not to have provided for national intercourse to any extent, across this stupendous barrier, except on the west, where an easy pass through Kabul, opens a way of communication between Central India and the countries westward of the Indus, which is of much historical note. But with its long line of projecting coast, India could scarcely fail of intercourse with other countries, by sea. Accordingly, there are traditions of an age prior to the Christian era by at least two centuries, relative to the planting of Buddhism in Ceylon, which imply that the Hindus were then accustomed to coasting navigation; and probably, the foreign commerce of the ports on the western coast of India, of which the author of the *Periplus of the Erythræan sea* gives an account, had long before his time brought India into communication with the commercial depôts of the Persian Gulf, and with Babylonia, Southern Arabia and Egypt. The astronomical science of the Hindus seems to have been borrowed in part from Babylonia, and possibly, their richly wrought rock-cut temples were designed in imitation of the sculptured caverns of Egypt. Early in the Christian era, as we have reason to believe, the doctrines of Buddhism were conveyed from India to Java.

The peninsula of India is divided by the Vindya into two parts, which differ widely from each other in their geographical features. To the north of this line of mountains, we have what is denominated *Hindustan* in the restricted sense, which is mostly a lowland, watered by the Ganges and the Indus, with their tributaries. To the south, on the other hand, stretches the Dekhan, so called from the Sanskrit word *dakshina*, signifying *southern*, which may be characterized as a table-land. There is a difference also, between the country of the Indus and that of the Ganges. The former has a comparatively limited cultivation, for the munsûns only skirt along its eastern borders, and lying so far to the west, it belongs geographically, rather to Iran than to

India ; it is also separated from the country of the Ganges by an extensive sandy waste. But the latter is a broad, sunny region, fertilized by abundant rains, and sheltered on all sides by mountains ; while in the midst of it rolls a majestic river, opening to the sea. This lowland was marked by nature, for a seat of agriculture, a centre of commerce, an abode of civilization and empire ; and it became historically, the scene of those conflicts which prepared the way for the founding of Hindu states ; of the ripening of the religious and civil institutions of the Hindus ; of the elevation to magnificence and the sinking into decay of successive dynasties of so-called "universal sovereigns." But the tableland of the Dekhan, supported along its outer limits by mountain-ranges, appropriately called *Ghats*, or steps to the water's edge, is cut up, in the interior, by lines of mountains which traverse from one Ghat to the other. Owing moreover, to its general inclination eastward, most of its rivers flow into the Bay of Bengal ; and only one of these, the Mahānada, is navigable into the interior. The history of the Dekhan, therefore, no less than that of the country of the Ganges, was to a great extent determined by its physical character, for this south-country has always been the seat of numerous independent principalities, with no high degree of civilization ; and supposing the aboriginal inhabitants of Central India to have been at some period, displaced by the immigration of a powerful foreign race, we might expect to find remains of them, if any where, in the fastnesses of the Dekhan.

But nature has not made the Dekhan inaccessible, or approachable only with difficulty, from the region of plenty, civilization and paramount power on the other side of the Vindya. On the contrary, this separating barrier recedes from the western sea-coast, and breaks off into a gradual slope upon Bengal and Orissa on the east,—thus leaving two passages open, for intercommunication between the north and the south ; and besides these, there are practicable passes directly across the Vindya. Here again, history is found to have conformed to the geography of the country ; for the Hindus have ancient traditions referring to the peaceful settlement of individuals of their race, as well as

to an enterprize of conquest by their ancestors, in Southern India.

The important productions of the soil and the animals of India are made the subject of several distinct sections of Professor Lassen's work, in which special attention is given to a comparison of their names with those of the same plants, or animals in other countries, and the nomenclature of natural history, in the classics, and in the languages of modern Europe, receives many interesting illustrations. At the same time, a pleasing surprise is awakened to find, that India is probably the native country of so many of the necessities of life, as well as luxuries, of the nations of the west.

We come now to our author's analysis of the population of India. Much labor appears to have been bestowed upon this part of his work, and it materially enriches the science of ethnology. A comparison of the population of Hindustan with that of the Dekhan, generally considered, discovers to us at once, two distinct races. We find indeed, the same physical traits in the people of the south as in those of the north, except that the southern complexion is, in general, the darkest; but, what is of the highest moment with respect to national affinity, two distinct classes of languages are found to prevail on the opposite sides of the line of the Vindya. The languages of the Dekhan, as classified by Professor Lassen, are the Tuluva, the Malabar, the Tamul, the Telinga, the Karnata, and the Singhalese, the relations of which to the Sanskrit he sums up as follows: ⁴

"A more critical investigation of the languages of the Dekhan has shown, that they have been enriched from the Sanskrit, but are quite independent of it, as to their origin. Their phonetic system is distinct, and so the fundamental part of their vocabularies, embracing the words in most common use; and farther, what is decisive, their grammatical structure is peculiar. With this philological fact accord the traditions of the Dekhan, indicating, as they do, that the Dekhanese were originally in a rude state, and that settlers from the north brought to them their civilization. The traditions of the continent agree here, with those of the island of Ceylon, and the phenomena of the religious and political state of the Dekhan, at the present time, establish the fact of its having received its civilization from that source. Its alphabets, also, came from the north. Yet certain peculiarities are likewise found, which not

⁴ S. *Ind. Alterthumsk.* p. 363.

being referable to Arya teachers, must be considered as remains of usages properly belonging to the south-country. Nor has the civilization brought from the north, penetrated every where; many tribes are met with in the Dekhan, which have adopted only a part, sometimes more, and sometimes less, of the imported culture; one indeed, that of the Tuda in the Nilagiri, had, until within a short time, received no such civilizing influence."

The Dekhanese are regarded by our author as aborigines of India. The important fact however, here established, is that the natives of the south, and the Aryas, or Sanskrit-speaking people of Hindustan, are not kindred to each other, and that the former received their civilization from the latter. But in the Vindya mountains is found a population not only distinct both in physical traits and language, from the Aryas, but in the one respect, and perhaps also in the other, differing from the population of the Dekhan. We refer to the Bhillas, Gondas, Pahârias, and other tribes of mountaineers.

"The people of the Dekhan and the tribes of the Vindya," says Professor Lassen,⁵ "do not sustain the same relation to the Aryas. Among the former, with some not numerous exceptions, we find the religious and civil institutions of the Aryas, in company with languages which, though much modified by Arya accessions, are original and peculiar as to their forms and primitive words. Among the latter, wherever an original language has been retained, as among the Gondas, the Kandas, and the Pahârias, there is nothing of the civilization of the Aryas, or merely a sprinkling of it; but, wherever, on the other hand, Arya civilization has penetrated, and prevailed, as among the Kolas of Guzerat and others, the language of the Aryas has also come into use; and the same is true even where but little of that civilization has been communicated, as among the Bhillas. The influence of the Aryas appears, therefore, to have varied in its kind; which, as it seems to us, can be explained only by supposing, that they came to the Dekhan in feeble numbers, as proselyting and civilizing settlers, who could disseminate their culture, not their language; but that they came upon the Vindya, and into the north-western part of the Dekhan, not only as individual representatives of a more cultivated people, but as rulers of the land, as a conquering multitude, and displaced or subjugated the earlier inhabitants. The forefathers of the Mahrattas, for example, must have ascended as conquerors, at a remote period, from the valley of the Tapti to the highlands above it. Even where they have not taken exclusive possession of the open country, their numbers must have been sufficiently large, and their power sufficiently great, to give a predominance to their language. Some of the aborigines, as the Gondas and kindred tribes, were not reached by the dominion of the Aryas, and accordingly have preserved their own language."

⁵ *S. Ind. Alterthumsk.* p. 383.

This view of the relation of the inhabitants of the Vindya to the Aryas, together with the fact that certain tribes exist in the Himâlaya, as far west as Baluchistan, which seem to be allied to those of the Vindya, naturally lead us to suppose that these mountaineers represent an aboriginal population rent asunder, and driven in opposite directions, by the forcible advance of the Aryas into the land of the Ganges.

How the Vindya-people are related to the Dekhanese is not yet fully determined. That they differ from the people of the Dekhan in physical traits, has already been mentioned ; yet as this may have resulted from their different circumstances of life, and from their not having intermarried with the Aryas, to the same extent with the inhabitants of Southern India, the decision of the question in respect to their affinity to these, is thrown upon a comparison of languages. But the languages spoken in the Vindya are not yet sufficiently known to justify any conclusion on philological grounds. Should they be found to be fundamentally the same with those of the Dekhan, the legitimate inference will be, that the wild inhabitants of the Vindya exhibit the physical type originally borne by the Dekhanese, in common with themselves ; and in addition to this, should the rude tribes of the Himâlaya just now alluded to, be found akin to those of the Vindya, we shall then be brought to the conclusion, that the entire population of India, so far as known, excepting the people whose primitive language was the Sanskrit, is of one family. On the other hand, should the languages of the Vindya and of the Dekhan prove to be not of the same stock, the inhabitants of this mountain-range and any other people elsewhere, of the same lineage, will then be placed together in a common contrast, both with the Aryas and the Dekhanese, as kindred to neither.

This analysis of the population of India presents to us the people whose languages are based upon the Sanskrit, as of a foreign race, which having immigrated into Central India, drove away its aborigines to the mountain-fastnesses ; and then pressing southward, subdued some of the tribes of the Vindya ; after which, the limits of its civilization were still farther extended in the same direction, by peaceful colonies, or by individual emigrants who gained command over the

rude natives, through their superior knowledge and cultivation.

Let us now consider whence this race came into India. In the first place, the physical traits of the Aryas show them to belong to the Caucasian family of nations. The only apparent exception is the black skin of the Bengalese, which, however, may be attributed either to a mixture of blood with some other race, or races, or to the climate, or to habits of life, or to all these and perhaps other special causes. Moreover, to use in part our author's words, the geographical position of the older inhabitants of India relatively to the Aryas, makes it certain that the direction in which the latter spread themselves, was from west to east. The mass of the Arya population is broadest in the west, reaching at the northwestern end of the Himâlaya, far northward, while at the south-eastern end, the whole table-land is occupied by a Tibetan population. It is also evident that the Aryas passed the Vindya mountains first, at their western termination; for at the eastern extremity of this range, the wild tribe of the Pahârias have even to this day maintained themselves; and the Odras, inhabitants of Orissa, are represented as barbarians even in the Code of Manu, that is, some time after the Hindu institutions had been matured, and have received their culture from Bengal, on the east.

"It is true," as Professor Lassen says,⁶ "one might be disposed to regard the greater sanctity ascribed to the north, in the conceptions of the Hindus, as an unconscious reference to a closer connection which they formerly had with the countries of the north. To the north, into the Himâlaya and beyond, are carried the abodes of most of the gods; the wondrous, sacred mount Meru is believed to be in the highest, remotest region of the north. Yet a more careful consideration will lead to the conviction, that these conceptions developed themselves first in India, and are to be accounted for by the peculiar natural features of the northern mountain-range. The daily looking upon the snow-peaks of the Himâlaya, flashing their brightness down upon the plains, and strictly inaccessible, reports received of the wholly different character of the high table-land beyond, with its wide-spread, silent domains, of its clear, cloudless atmosphere, and of the natural productions peculiar to it, could not fail to make this north the seat of the gods and the scene of prodigies."

⁶ *S. Ind. Alterth.* p. 511.

If we consult the tradition of the Hindus themselves on the subject of our present inquiry, we find indeed that it makes them indigenous to India; yet the position it assigns to the primitive seat of their religious and civil institutions in that country, is an important indication for us, of their true origin. This abode of primitive times is placed by tradition, on the confines of the waste which separates the country of the Indus from the valley of the Ganges. But the language of the Aryas enables us to trace them still farther westward, even to Iran; for the Sanskrit has a closer connection with the Zend, than with any other language of the Indo-European family. Here it deserves particular attention, that the near affinity of all the languages of Europe to the Sanskrit is, of itself, conclusive against supposing the Aryas to be indigenous to India, since it would require us on such a supposition to believe, that the original family-seat of all the European nations was India,—which is forbidden by the entire absence of any discoverable peculiarity derived from that country, in either the languages, customs, or manner of thinking of those nations. The Aryas may also be traced to Iran, by the identity of their name with that which Herodotus gives to the Medes, *Ἀγριοί*, and which the Zendavesta attributes to the primogenitors of the Iranese, in the name of its sacred land: *Airyanem Vaedjô*, or land of the Aryas. Another important consideration is, that from the alpine country of Ghor, the traditionary seat of the Afghans, along the southern slope of the Hindukush mountains, and through the valley of the Kabul river, that is, from the borders of Iran to India, are found at intervals, clusters of inhabitants who in their character, religious belief and languages, so far as investigated, have resemblance both to the people of Iran and to the Hindus,—thus forming a chain by which the ethnologist is led to connect the latter with the former. To all these grounds for inferring that the Hindus came originally from Iran, may be added yet another, which is, that their doctrines and traditions have in some points a remarkable coincidence with those of the Iranese, not admitting of explanation as the result of neighborly communication, inasmuch as some significant “traditions and appellations known to both,” to

use our author's words,⁷ have "partly a different and partly an opposite acceptation with the one people, from that which they have with the other, showing that originally there must have been an agreement, which in the progress of time, after the separation of the two people, either became lost without leaving any trace, or was impaired by changes, or was turned to contrariety, by a schism of opinion."

This question of the origin of the Hindus was first distinctly treated, we believe, in an essay by A. W. v. Schlegel, published in 1834, in the *Transactions of the Royal Society of Literature of the United Kingdom*; but we are not aware of its having been thoroughly discussed by any writer previous to Professor Lassen; and no one who duly weighs the several arguments bearing upon it, which we have drawn from the pages of the work before us, can hesitate to approve of the decision of our author, that "the Arya inhabitants of India once lived united with the nations of Iran, and longer with them than with any other."⁸ But Professor Lassen, extending his researches still farther, has even made a suggestion as to the particular locality of this primeval life in common, which we will give in his own language:⁹

"If we decide that the Aryas of India and the people of Iran originally had an abode in common, and that not in India, we shall at the same time be prepared to find a tradition of its locality, among the Iranese, rather than among the Hindus. We have already observed, that the Hindus have no such tradition, although they imagine to themselves a sacred land and seats of divinities, in the north of India. The people of Iran, on the contrary, plainly designate as a primitive abode, their *Aryanam Vaedjô*, or land of the Aryas, which they place in the extreme east of the whole table-land of Iran, in the region of the sources of the Oxus and Yaxartes: by the death-bearer Ahriman it had been smitten with winter, and had only two summer months, with ten months of winter. . . . We can think of no other region than the cold highlands on the western declivity of the Belurtag and Mustag, or of the sacred mount Berezat, (Borj,) which is invoked in the Zendavesta as a fountain-head of waters, and of which the Hindus perhaps have preserved a reminiscence, inasmuch as in their mythical cosmography, they make the great rivers to flow from this region.

That the primeval seat of the Iranese is to be looked for here, is an opinion very much strengthened by the fact, that we find offsets from their stock on both sides of this high eminence; for the old settled inhab-

⁷ S. Ind. Alterth. p. 526.

⁸ S. Ind. Alterth. p. 516.

⁹ S. Ind. Alterth. p. 526.

itants of Khasgar, Yarkand, Khotan, Aksu, Turfān and Khamil, are Tādshik, (of Bactrian descent,) and speak Persian; it is here alone that the Aryas spread themselves into the interior of Upper Asia,—their strongest and most vigorous germ seems to have been planted on this high mountain."

With this view, according to our author, coincides the Hebrew tradition respecting the primitive abode of mankind.

"It may be added," says Professor Lassen,¹⁰ "that the land of Iran, in the widest sense, is represented in the well-known and venerable tradition of the Hebrews, which stands by itself on the side of the Shemites, as the country of the primogenitors of this second great branch of the Caucasian family of nations: the Shemites dwell south-west of that highland, their tradition points to the highland in the north-east, as their home. Whatever signification may be given to the tradition respecting Eden, its geography can not be satisfactorily explained, except by such a conception of it as may be supposed to have been formed in the imagination of an ancient people,—having a foundation of facts, while at the same time the great essential features are made prominent, and the unessential are set aside, so that the whole is embraced in a picture of simple, grand outline. Such a picture is made of Eden, if it is conceived of as compassed by the waters of the Tigris and Euphrates on the west, and of the Oxus and Indus on the east. It is then the highlands of Iran, in the widest sense, which are ascended from the lowlands of Mesopotamia, of Turan, and of the Pentapotamy, and are inclosed by the Zagros mountain-ranges and the Armenian mountains on the west, and by the Belurtag, Hindukush and the Suleiman mountains on the east,—a conception and manner of bounding which even scientific geography need not reject. At the same time, the extreme borders of this table-land, or the country about Ararat, and the neighborhood of the Belurtag, have a significant prominence in the most ancient traditions of the Shemites and the Aryas, respectively, as their original seats. The reminiscences of these races reach back only to the time when they had already taken possession of the western and eastern extremities of this highland. To this common father-land, to this pre-historical contact with each other of the Shemites and Indo-Europeans, to which the radical connection of their languages also bears witness, are to be referred those primitive traditions of the two races, which can not have come into the possession of both by later intercourse between them, and are indeed too widely spread, and too peculiarly modified, to have been borrowed by one from the other, within the limits of history,—such as the tradition of the four ages, of the ten primogenitors, and of the deluge."

An interesting part of the work before us relates to the peculiarities of the Hindu mind, as exhibited in its literary productions and religious history, which our author refers

¹⁰ *S. Ind. Alterth.* p. 523.

both to the climate of India, and the luxuriance of its soil in vegetation unknown under the western sky of the home of the Aryas, and to an original difference in mental endowment, between the Indo-Europeans and the Shemites. But we pass this by, to follow Professor Lassen in his criticism of the sources of the ancient history of India, which shows much acute discrimination, and affords a clearer view of the degree of authority to which the Hindu Epics and the Purânas are entitled, as records of events, than has ever before been given by any writer known to us.

Of the two great Sanskrit Epics, the Ramâyana and the Mahâbhârata, the former is the oldest,

“not only,” in the language of our author,¹¹ “because it sets forth an occurrence of higher antiquity, and true to its plan, makes no mention of later events; but also because the view of the world which predominates in it belongs to earlier times: its geography includes only the country north of the Vindya,—in the south is a mere wilderness of forests, of which the inhabitants are apes; and in its cosmography, the great islands constituting the world, have no place. The Mahâbhârata takes the whole of India within its sphere; in the great conflict which it celebrates we have mention made even of the fall of the Pândya king of southern Mathurâ, a circumstance which cannot possibly have belonged to the original Kâurava legend.”

The Epics differ from one another also, as is here intimated, in the plan of their composition. The Ramâyana has a single theme, the adventures of Rama, a prince of northern India who, having been exiled from his paternal kingdom, sought to retrieve his fortune, by subjugating the barbarians of the south. The Mahâbhârata, on the contrary, is manifestly a collection of separate traditions, the nucleus of which is the story of the ancient civil strife between the Kâuravas and Pândavas, or the partisans of two rival claimants of regal authority over the Hindus.

Both of these great compositions, however, give internal evidence of the transmission of their sagas from age to age by oral communication and public recitation; which leads one to suppose that both have been more or less altered,

¹¹ S. *Ind. Alterth.* p. 487.

in the progress of time ; and especially the Mahâbhârata, since this, as it includes many different subjects, must have been longer in an unfinished state than the other Epic.

"If we consider," says Professor Lassen,¹² "the modifications which ancient Hindu tradition has undergone, in consequence of its having been transmitted at first, by the lips of the rhapsodists, so that it necessarily took to itself every impression of the changing times, as well as in consequence of the concern of the priesthood in its final rounding off and settlement, we shall find it to have been remodeled in a manner to generalize away the physiognomy of earlier ages, and that its whole material was managed by the priesthood, for religious ends. The view of the world which originated at a later period, intruded itself into the more ancient saga ; the doctrine of the three great deities, that of the four castes and their relative positions, and whatever else was not in the conception of the Hindus originally, incorporated itself even into the traditions of the earliest times. The priestly element and theogonies also, encroached upon the martial character of the heroic saga, and narrowed its sphere. The effect of the conflicts in the Ramâyana is to excite astonishment, by that which is wondrous and supernatural in personages and weapons, rather than admiration, by the display of great human power, consistent with nature. Single books of the Mahâbhârata, in which the picture of heroic conflict is still preserved unimpaired, represent to us that martial inspiration and delight in combat, which once filled the ancient heroes and bards.

But there are parts of the Epics which Professor Lassen thinks must have been handed down to us without any essential alteration, from as early a period as the sixth century before Christ. The grounds of this opinion are, that these parts contain no allusion to the Buddhist schism, which, on the other hand, is referred to elsewhere, in the Epic poetry ; that they give no intimation of the separation of the Sivâites and Vishnuites into two sects, which however, seems to have taken place before the time of Megasthenes ; and that the late deciphering of inscriptions in the common language of India, of the third century before Christ, has proved the Epic-language to have belonged to an age even much earlier. Although, therefore, Professor Lassen speaks of the time when the Sanskrit Epics were brought to their present form, as "one of the darkest and most bewildering fields of research, relative to India,"¹³ yet he maintains, "that in the Epic poems, after a critical separation of their later parts, we have

¹² *S. Ind. Alterth.* p. 487.

¹³ *S. Ind. Alterth.* pp. 490, 494.

a rich treasure of ancient and genuine tradition." What this consists of, he more distinctly defines in the following language : ¹⁴

"What the Epic poems contain of historical tradition, in the more confined sense, which alone concerns us at present, may be divided under two heads: first there are genealogies, *gotravansas*, or lists of ancient dynasties, and then traditions relating to individuals, not to kings only, but in very many cases, to the holy men of past ages. Very few and isolated are the statements which can be at once appropriated as historical; for the most part, we have here legendary narratives, which can be made out to have an historical importance, only by a right interpretation; and this is often attended with difficulty, since the world of *sagas* is to us, as yet so new and so little explored."

The Purânas borrow their most ancient traditions from the great Epics; but have, also, an authority of their own with reference to times comparatively modern, as they embody traditions transmitted through persons attached to the princely houses of India, in the double capacity of charioteers and bards, who shared in the dangers and exploits of the reigning prince which their minstrelsy celebrated, preserved the pedigree of his family, and kept fresh the remembrance of the achievements of his ancestors. Even the latest of the Epics is entirely silent respecting events subsequent to the termination of the strife between the Kâuravas and Pândavas; and the chain of tradition is prolonged only by the data of the Purânas, which follow down to quite late times the royal race of Magadha, a kingdom centered in the modern Behar

But trustworthy chronological calculations can not be made upon the basis of either the epic, or the purânic royal lists. The former are inconsistent with each other; and as for the chronology of the latter, it rests upon the assumption, that the termination of the civil strife commemorated in the Mahâbhârata, was coeval with the close of the third age of the world, according to the Brahman theory of four ages, of which the present is the last: that is, that the great civil conflict ceased B. C. 3102; but on this supposition the commencement of the reign of a certain Chandragupta is brought down only to B. C. 1503,

¹⁴ S. Ind. Alterth. p. 494.

while yet we know from the historian Justin, who speaks of this sovereign under the name of Sandracottus, that his reign began as late as in the first part of the fourth century before Christ.

"Since then," to use again the language of our author,¹⁵ "the native sources present a chronology of the more ancient times which is manifestly inadmissible, the attempt has been made, simply from the elements given, to determine the commencement of the historical times of the ancient Hindus, the period of the great war, and the beginning of the Kaliyuga, (the fourth age of the world.) We may call this the commencement of the historical times, inasmuch as the ancient Hindus appear to have had no lists of dynasties, with statements of the years of single reigns, until after the great war. To come at the point, two different ways lay open: either to reckon back from the time of Chandragupta, the sum total of the years given to reigns preceding his, that is, 1598 years, or else 1015 years, agreeably to a tradition, independent of that computation of the lengths of reigns preceding Chandragupta, that between Parikshit, (the first sovereign spoken of after the war,) and Nanda, (the name of a dynasty which gave place to Chandragupta,) this latter number of years elapsed. By the one mode of calculating, a period was reached, beyond the nineteenth century before our era; by the other, a period in the fourteenth century before Christ."

Our author argues from the lists themselves, as well as on other grounds, in favor of adopting the alternative of counting back about one thousand years from the known age of Chandragupta; which brings us to the line "between the remoter heroic age, with its sagas, and the later age of more definite recollections," at about thirteen centuries before Christ.

The continuation of this work of Professor Lassen will carry the history of India through its mythic age, and having treated of the expedition of Alexander, an event with which India first looms up distinctly to the historical inquirer, will take up what may be called the Hindu middle ages, the period of the Bactrian and Indo-Scythian kingdoms, to the history of which, it is well known, valuable accessions have been derived from recently discovered coins, deciphered partly by our author. The ages of the predominance of the Muhammedans and Europeans, with which we are more familiarly acquainted, will be passed over rapidly. After

¹⁵ *S. Ind. Alterth.* p. 563.

the general history of India has in this manner been drawn out, Professor Lassen will give us, it is expected, an historical view of the religious and literary developments of the Hindu mind.

We have recently heard, with deep regret, that this distinguished savant is at present suffering with weak eyes, in consequence of his labors upon the Persepolitan inscriptions. May he soon be restored, and long pursue his important researches, in behalf of Oriental learning !

E. E. S.
